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## THE AMERICAN MOOD: A FOREIGN POLICY OF SELF-INTEREST

by John E. Rielly

### EXCERPT

Two years after Jimmy Carter took office, both the American public and the country's opinion leaders are preoccupied with what they see as the diminishing position of the United States as the pre-eminent global power. They exhibit economic and military insecurity, worrying over the steep decline in the value of the dollar and a perceived increase in Soviet military power. Their support for defense spending is higher than at any other time since the early 1960s; yet they are wary of the kind of direct involvement in the affairs of other countries that characterized U.S. foreign policy in that decade.

These are the major findings of a new national survey of American public opinion on foreign policy issues. The conclusion that emerges most clearly from the data is that Americans have a heightened feeling of self-interest in their country's behalf. They are far more concerned today about securing an adequate supply of energy and protecting American jobs and business interests than about such altruistic goals as combating world hunger, raising the standard of living in less developed countries, and bringing democracy to other nations. There is a reluctance to make commitments everywhere, but

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at the same time a growing willingness to honor selective commitments somewhere. Above all, the missionary zeal that seemed to inspire Americans in the 1960s finds no resonance in popular or leadership opinion today.

The survey, which was sponsored by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations (CCFR), was carried out by the Gallup Organization. During the last two weeks of November 1978, a systematic, stratified national sample of 1,546 American men and women from all walks of life was interviewed in person. In addition, between late

Of a list of five friendly countries (Chile, France, Iran, Italy, and Mexico), the majority of the public would regard the coming to power of a Communist government through peaceful elections as a "great threat" only in the case of Mexico.

November and early January, a "leadership" sample was interviewed by telephone or in person. It included 366 people selected from the Carter administration, Congress, international business, labor, the media, academia, religious institutions, foreign policy organizations, and special interest groups.

This is the second CCFR study of the foreign policy attitudes of Americans. The first one, conducted in December 1974, followed on the heels of Richard Nixon's resignation, the election of the heavily Democratic 94th Congress, and the withdrawal of the last U.S. combat troops from Vietnam. On some issues, the recent results are compared with